



## **Plot Twist: The Russian Gambit (Post-ST3) by Pavel Mikhailovich Florensky**

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**Characters:** Eleven/Jane H., Joyce B., Max M., Mike W.

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**Summary:** This is set after ST3: spoiler alert! The kids get together over Christmas Break. All but one are unaware of the challenges and dangers they are about to face at the hands of a mysterious conspiracy. Hearts will be shattered. Trust will be tested. Friendships will be questioned. Lives will be at stake.

## 1. Chapter 1

*This is my highly speculative take on a ST4-type story. Clearly it will become extreme-AU as soon as ST4 is actually released but there's plenty of time before that happens. I apologize if the dialogue is a bit choppy but I have little talent for natural-sounding human speech patterns. Updates will be irregular: sometimes within hours and sometimes within weeks. I will make no promises because "friends don't lie."*

*In this story any Russian dialogue is written in transliterated form. English translation is in brackets at the end of the "paragraph."*

*Example: "Slova," X said. [Words.]*

*Transliteration is used so English readers (seeing as this is written in English) can grasp the sound.*

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*Furthermore, if someone thinks they can do a better job using this premise feel free to do so without asking permission. I don't take personal ownership of any part of this work. It is entirely a matter of personal fulfillment and endeavor.*

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*Please enjoy! Спасибо за чтение!*

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**April 1976: Arkhangelsk, Russian SFSR, USSR**

Down an unlit hallway three figures became clear from the darkness. A woman in a uniform with two large men flanking her turned from the passage into a metal doorway. Pushing through, she opened a second door into a better lit space with a bed and austere furnishings. There was a little boy sitting on the bed; he stood when she entered.

"Vy gotovy?" she asked him. [Are you ready?]

"Da mem," he replied. [Yes ma'am.]

"Khorosho. Vremya prishlo," she said with a laugh as she exited the way she came. [Good. It is time.]

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### **June 1976: Indianapolis, Indiana, USA**

"We're so excited to finally take our new son home! We wanted a second child—hopefully a boy this time—but never could manage it. But now we've got one!" Karen Wheeler shouted with glee as her husband passed a clipboard to a serious-looking official.

"Yes. It's taken a while," Ted added absentmindedly.

"Well congratulations Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler. This is a special day. The boy—Michael—is waiting for you in the hall now. Are you ready to meet him?" the official replied.

The couple nodded and followed the woman out into the aforementioned passageway. There a small boy sitting on a bench. The new parents bent down and greeted the five-year-old with smiles and outstretched arms.

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### **1983: Episode 1: The Vanishing of Will Byers**

Mike had stormed out of the dining room and into his bedroom. It was a bit unusual for family squabbles to explode into such chaos but he needed an excuse to get back upstairs. He had heard a soft electronic beeping during dinner and knew he had to inspect the source. Reaching under his mattress, Mike pulled out a silver metallic box with five controls and a single headphone piece. He placed the speaker to his ear and pushed a red button.

"Vy aktivirovany. Aktiv byl poteryan komandoy Brennera. Naydi yeye," a voice said firmly. [You are being activated. Asset has been lost by Brenner's team. Find her.]

"Priznannyy," he answered into a microphone on the box.

[Acknowledged.]

Mike stowed the device back in its hiding place after deciding to call Lucas on his Supercom.

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### **1983: Episode 2: The Weirdo on Maple Street**

After leaving the girl—Eleven—in the basement, Mike returned to his room and withdrew the silver box again. Pressing a green button he quickly lifted it to his mouth.

"YA nashel devushku. Ona v podvale. Zakazy?" he said. [I found the girl. She is in the basement. Orders?]

"Podderzhivat' tekushchiy status. Ne dat' amerikantsam zabrat' svoy aktiv. Deaktivirovan do dal'neyshego uvedomleniya," the stern voice replied. [Maintain current status. Prevent Americans from retaking the asset. Deactivated until further notice.]

"Priznannyy," he answered again. [Acknowledged.]

## 2. Chapter 2

*See "Disclaimer" at the beginning of Chapter 1.*

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### December 1985: Post-ST3: Hawkins, Indiana, USA

It had been two years since the silver box in Mike's bedroom had made any noise. That changed the week after Hawkins' schools let out for the term. The boy ran to close his door as he withdrew the device from its position and into his hands. Pressing the red button once again he waited.

"Vy reaktivirovany. Issledovatel'skaya gruppa stolknulas' s nerazreshimymi problemami. Nam nuzhna devushka. Kogda ona pridet v gorod, poshlite signal agentu B. Pikap budet oblegchen. Vash status funktsionalen?" the voice instructed. [You are being reactivated. The research team has run into unsolvable problems. We need the girl. When she comes to the town send a signal to Agent B. Pickup will be facilitated. Is your status functional?]

Mike paused for a long breath and a small tear managed to escape his left eye before he replied: "Da. Budet sdelano. Priznannyy." [Yes. It will be done. Acknowledged.]

The device went silent as the teenager stowed it away. Laying down on the bed, he wept silently into the soft pillow.

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### December 1985: Hawkins, Indiana, USA

The Byers family—and El—had not come back since leaving the previous summer. The kids had been to visit them in their new home at Thanksgiving, but otherwise all contact had been through radios and telephones. Now—however—El and Will were headed to the Wheeler household for Christmas. Both of them were excited to see their friends. Every bus stop on the way was an eternity for the two teenagers to sit through due to the energy between them.

"Do you think much has changed?" Will asks the girl.

"No. I don't think so. Mike says its all the same," El replied.

"I guess that's probably true. It is Hawkins after all. Monsters and secret labs are the only sorts of excitement there," the boy said in turn.

Silence settled between them until they reached the stop at the edge of Hawkins. Leaping from their seats, they raced off the bus and towards a car waiting nearby. Steve Harrington sat in the driver's seat with four kids accompanying him. The three boys and single girl dashed from the vehicle until the two groups nearly collided. El and Mike immediately entered into a fierce embrace while the others greeted Will more calmly—though only slightly less enthusiastically.

"It's been so long," El said to the dark-haired boy in her arms.

"I know but now you're here. I don't want to waste a moment thinking of the time we spent apart," Mike answered passionately.

They looked into each others' eyes for a moment before indulging in a deep kiss. There was no sign of the two parting until a red-haired girl smacked the tall boy in the shoulder.

"I don't want to come in between 'true love' but can the rest of us say 'hi' first?" Max said with exasperation; it's not as if she expected anything else.

Mike pulled back somewhat and looped his arm with El's while she greeted the rest of her friends. After a few minutes of camaraderie and reunion a car-horn blared loudly. Steve gestured to them impatiently. In his defense it was rather cold. The kids piled into the car and chatted loudly until they reached the Wheeler residence.

As they entered, Karen Wheeler gave a look of faux-exasperation at the sight of the rambunctious teenagers. All of them had arranged with their parents to spend the night. It wasn't everyday that their much-missed friends came to visit. Once finished paying their respects to the adults, the kids hurried down to the basement. Steve rolled his eyes and bid Karen a quick farewell before leaving in his car: the kids deserved some time to themselves. Nancy and Jonathan had met up in Chicago for some time alone, so he was planning to

spend the evening with Robin.

"Still think you know how to play?" Lucas asked Will teasingly while gesturing to a Dungeons and Dragons board.

"Of course I do," Will replied with a laugh.

"Let's do this!" Max exclaimed as the six friends settled down for a campaign.

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### **Later that Night**

Mike had excused himself to go to the bathroom while the rest prepared for their 'epic sleepover' downstairs. Now in his bedroom, the boy reached for the silver box and held it in his hands pensively. A distraught look came across his face before he threw the item onto the floor. As he stood to leave a sense of pain overcame him before he returned and picked it up again. Moving stiffly, his hands pressed a blue button which began flashing.

"B zdes'. Tsel' nakhoditsya v pozitsii?" a male voice asked. [B here. Is the target in position?]

"Da. V podvale. Stsenariy chetvertyy," Mike replied. [Yes. In the basement. Scenario four.]

"Otlichno srabotano. Pikap budet v chetyre. Nikakikh deystviy ne trebuyetsya. Podgotov'tes' k izvlecheniyu za odnu nedelyu, yesli uspeshno," the man said. [Well done. The pickup will be at four. No action required. Prepare for extraction in one week if successful.]

"Ponyal i priznal," Mike chocked out as the transmission terminated. He wiped away a single tear as he hid the device and returned to the basement. [Understood and acknowledged.]

### 3. Chapter 3

*See "Disclaimer" at the beginning of Chapter 1.*

*If you like or hate this story please leave a review. I would love to hear your thoughts. Thank you! Спасибо!*

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#### Three-Fifteen AM: Wheeler Basement:

Most of the kids had fallen asleep sometime around two so it was only Mike and El who remained conscious. They were laying on makeshift mats and holding hands until Mike suddenly pulled away. Confused, the girl looked over at her boyfriend with a questioning expression.

"Mike, is something wrong?" EL asked.

"I... I'm sorry El," was his only response.

"Sorry? What are you sorry for? You have nothing to be sorry for, Mike," she said with puzzled intonation.

"You have no idea," Mike whispered barely audibly. Silence filled the room for five minutes before Mike suddenly shot up and yelled: "Everyone up! Now."

Bleary-eyed, the other kids looked around until settling their gazes upon Mike.

"What are you doing, Mike? It's the middle of the night," Lucas queried. The others echoed this sentiment before being cutoff.

"We don't have time to discuss this. I need everyone to just follow me here, alright? We have to leave now. I mean now. There are bad men coming as we speak and we have to go. I'll explain later but there's no time to waste," Mike ranted.

Several objections and expressions of confusion filled the room before Mike looked at El imploringly.

She paused before saying: "Okay. Everyone get ready. We have to trust each other." Mike simply looked down and blushed with what the others didn't recognize as guilt.

The kids scrambled to get dressed as Mike continued to ignore their questions. Finally, they gathered next to the door and were ready to leave when Mike froze.

"What's wrong?" Will asked cautiously.

"I can't... El, I need you to knock me out and take me with you. Can you do that?" the boy asked solemnly.

"Mike, what... I would never... Mike?" El stammered in shock.

Turning promptly, Mike addressed Max: "Just do it."

"You better have a good reason for this later if El tries to kill me," the redhead girl said as she swung a bike lock down on the teenager. He dropped to the floor and was picked up by a frazzled Lucas and Dustin.

"I'm so confused right now," Dustin said.

"Honestly, I've wanted to do that for a while now. Felt good," Max said with a wry grin. El glared at her.

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#### **Four AM: Woods near the Wheeler Residence:**

The kids had taken up position in the woods a good distance from the house. They now waited to see if their friend had been right to wake them up in the middle of the night. Suddenly three black vans came down the street and stopped in front of the Wheeler's house. Their occupants jumped out in matching black and rushed to the basement door. As soon as they broke through, Will gestured for everyone to back away. They now knew that Mike had been right to warn them.

A couple of hours later the group had situated themselves in a forest ravine. Mike was beginning to move and El stroked his hair. The girl had placed the boy's head in her lap. She didn't understand how Mike knew about the looming danger or why he wanted to be knocked out

but she knew he loved her.

"Moya golova kruzhitsya," Mike whispered. [My head is spinning.]

El barely heard him and exclaimed: "Mike! What are you saying?".

The boy didn't respond for another few moments until he opened his eyes. All the teenagers had gathered around to see their friend regain consciousness.

"You okay, Mike?" Lucas asked.

"Yeah; your girlfriend didn't completely kill me," Mike said with sarcasm.

"You did ask for it," Max replied.

"True," Mike sighed.

"Do you feel well enough to answer questions?" Dustin asked.

"Just give me a minute," Mike answered feebly. After a quiet waiting the boy finally sat up. Max didn't hit him as hard as he had feared. He was beginning to feel better: in physical terms at least.

"I don't know if you're feeling up to it now but we need to discuss things so we can put together a plan," Max said.

"Yeah, fine. Let's get this over with," Mike said.

"You okay?" El asked softly.

"I'm feeling fine, El. Don't you worry," Mike replied with a half-confident smile.

"How did you know that those men were coming?" Lucas asked.

"Why did you ask me to knock you out?" Max added.

"What's going on?" Dustin interjected.

Holding up his hand to stop the cascade, Mike spoke: "Everyone should sit down. This is going to take a bit of explaining and a

hopefully not a lot of violence."

The friends sat down in a circle around Mike. El was clinging tightly to the boy's shoulder.

"So most of you don't know as much about me as you think you do," Mike started.

Everyone exchanged glances before fixating once again upon the dark-haired boy.

"I was adopted. It was before I knew most of you. Will, I think you were the only one that knew that," Mike said.

Eyes traveled to Will who nodded lightly before returning to their previous object of fascination.

"What none of you know is where I came from. My parents, the Wheelers that is, think I was adopted from an orphanage in Indianapolis. That's partially true but the part of the story they don't know is that I am originally from the Soviet Union," Mike continued before pausing for the predictable gasps of shock.

"So you're from the commie homeland. So what?" Lucas asked.

"Well, I'm getting to that. You see, it wasn't a mistake that I ended up in Hawkins," Mike said with a choking sound at the end. After a moment he carried on: "I am a spy."

There were many noises of shock and disbelief from the group of friends.

"What do you mean a 'spy'? How can you be a Soviet spy?" Dustin asked with shortened breath.

"I mean exactly what I said. I am a spy for the KGB. I was planted here to help them infiltrate the Hawkins National Lab and Brenner's research," Mike answered sharply. The boy now drew himself inwards, making him look both smaller and less exposed.

"I don't believe you," Max said.

"Vy dolzhny nachat' verit' mne. Ya dolgosrochnyy agent KGB na meste. Ya ne lgu tebe," Mike snapped. [You should start believing me. I am a long term onsite agent of the KGB. I am not lying to you.]

"Was that Russian?" Dustin asked. Most of the group had become near catatonic. Their trusted friend and sometimes leader was a spy for their country's great enemy.

"Da or yes," Mike said with a short-lived smile. Silence once again covered the proceedings.

"How could a five-year-old be a spy for the Russians?" Lucas asked incredulously.

"I was put in an intense psycho-training program at one year old. My parents were devoted members of the CPSU and turned me over to the KGB when they asked for me. They taught me English, indoctrinated me into their service values, and prepared me to be an American child," Mike said softly.

"You were turned into a weapon too?" El asked softly.

"I suppose you could look at it that way," he said with downcast eyes.

"So you just acted like one of us this whole time?" Lucas asked accusatorially. He seemed the most outraged.

"Yes. I mean in many respects I really was one of you. I just had this huge secret," Mike said feebly.

"So you speak Russian?" Dustin asked.

"Yes, Dustin! Move on!" Lucas shouted at his friend.

"Da. Ya govoryu po-russki i po-angliyski," Mike said with a kinder tone. [Yes. I speak Russian and English.]

"So those guys back there at your house were Russians?" Lucas asked. Anger was increasingly his dominant emotion through the course of this difficult conversation.

"Yes. They work for the KGB and were here to take El away. The

USSR is trying to explore the same technology as Brenner. When the lab under Starcourt Mall was destroyed they decided to take her and continue the work in the Russian heartland," Mike answered calmly.

"How did they know El was there? Did you tell them?" Lucas then accused.

Mike hung his head again and responded: "Yes. I reported to my handler that she was with us in the basement. They told me they would come for her at four. If their plan had gone properly I would have been picked up next week."

Now the real shock set in. Mike had sent the new 'bad men' El's location. He had betrayed them.

"Mike?" El queried.

"I'm so sorry, El. I hated myself the whole time I was doing it but you don't understand! I didn't have a choice. The pain! I can't control it most of the time. I'm so sorry," he cried while erupting into tears in his girlfriend's lap.

"I understand. I understand a lot, Mike," she said as she stroked his head comfortingly. Then, she leaned down and placed a kiss on his forehead softly.

"What do you mean pain?" Max interjected. Things were far too dire to allow time for emotions to rule the proceedings.

"It was part of the training. I was conditioned to be loyal to the KGB above all. Anytime I try to resist them I get an immense pain in my temple. It's horrible," he said weakly.

They all stared for a few minutes before he continued again looking at El: "I managed to do it though. I couldn't let them take you. I couldn't let them take you back to their horrid laboratory to be experimented on for who knows how long."

"So is that why I knocked you out tonight?" Max asked pointedly.

He answered sincerely: "Yes. I was afraid that if I saw them I would betray you all again. I couldn't allow that."

"Wait. If you're not actually 'Mike Wheeler' then do you have a different name?" Dustin asked. Trust Dustin to take the major shocks like everyday occurrences and focus on the small implications. It was endearing in Mike's mind actually.

"Yes, I do," Mike said with a laugh. He continued: "My birth name was Mikhail Romanovich Preobrazhensky. So the 'Mike' part isn't exactly a lie."

"You're a traitor," Lucas whispered to himself loudly enough to be heard.

"Technically I wasn't a traitor until tonight. I was a spy," Mike said before laughing sadly into his uplifted hands. He murmured: "I'm so sorry."

"How much of it was a lie, Mike? Are you even our friend?" Lucas interrogated.

"Lucas, of course he is," Will tried to intervene.

"That's okay Will. Lucas has every right to be mad at me. But yes, I thought of our friendship as real. That was never a lie," Mike replied earnestly.

"Does Nancy know?" Dustin asked.

"Of course not. She had no idea about any of it except the adoption. That was kind of the point," Mike answered.

"Well we can discuss this whole mess later. What are we going to do now? Can we go back? What's going on?" Max queried.

"Good point," Lucas added.

"I think all of you except El and I can go back if you want. They only want her and now me probably. It'd be too suspicious if they took anyone else. The American government would certainly take notice of it. Though there's no guarantee they'd leave you alone," Mike said.

"We can't just leave you guys though," Will countered.

"What we should do is go to the feds. They'd know what to do," Lucas postulated.

Silence filled the ravine again before Will suddenly shot his gaze towards Mike and said: "We can't do that! They can't know about Mike, can they? He'd be arrested."

Mike felt everyone's eyes upon him once again before responding: "Yes. They would most likely make me disappear. But this is all my fault anyways, so if that's what you need to do then I understand guys."

"Let's say we didn't want Mike to be taken. Where will we go?" Max asked.

"We don't want Mike to be taken," El said softly. The couple embraced again.

"I don't know anyone who can evade the Russians and the feds," Lucas said with a sarcastic laugh.

"I do," El said suddenly pulling back slightly from Mike.

"Who?" Dustin asked her.

"We need bus tickets to Chicago and I need a blindfold," she said in response.

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### **Nine AM: Hawkins Bus Station:**

After some brief explanations El had told them about her sister, Kali, and her ability to evade capture. Using Mike's jacket sleeve she managed to barely confirm that her sister was still in Chicago. Her powers were still weak but getting stronger every week. The kids managed to dodge the police car that rushed towards the Wheeler residence around seven. Karen and Ted Wheeler had probably awoken to a broken basement door and six missing children. Now on a bus, they were pulling away from the small Indiana town most of them called home.

"This is insane," Lucas said to Max. The two were sitting together.

"Yeah, but what's new?" the girl responded.

"Aren't Jonathan and Nancy in Chicago right now?" Dustin asked Will.

"Yeah. You're right. We should call them when we get there. They'll know what to do," Will answered.

Mike and El were having their own conversation in whispers at the front of the small group.

"I can't bear it El. I almost turned you over to bad men. You're my everything and I nearly destroyed that," Mike cried into her shoulder.

"No, Mike. You saved me from them again. I know what it's like to not have a choice. I know what it's like when the bad men take your childhood and make you a weapon. I opened the gate, remember? I don't think you did anything as bad as what I did. At least you didn't get anyone killed. You're my everything too," El replied while grabbing his hand.

"I love you El," Mike said.

"I love you too," she replied before smiling. El spoke again: "How do you say that in Russian?".

"Ya lyublyu tebya," Mike whispered to her. [I love you.]

"Ya liblu tibia," she mispronounced.

Mike gently corrected her: "lyublyu tebya."

"Ya lyublyu tebya," El said after a pause. Mike nodded and shifted to give the girl a hug.

"Why is that the two of you just get more disgusting every time something bad happens?" Will asked with a laugh. The couple turned around sharply and were surprised to see that Dustin and Will had been eavesdropping.

"I'll have to teach you Russian, El, so we can have our privacy back," Mike joked.

Dustin gave a smug look and said: "Nedelya dlinnaya." [The week is long.]

Mike rolled his eyes and shot back: "Pridurok." [Moron.]

Dustin looked back with confusion. Will, Mike, and El laughed.

## 4. Chapter 4

See "Disclaimer" at the beginning of Chapter 1.

Please enjoy reading and leave a review with your thoughts. Thank you!

Приятного чтения и, пожалуйста, напишите отзыв. Спасибо!

To all of those who have already reviewed I am especially grateful. Please consider leaving another.

Спасибо, если вы уже написали отзыв. Пожалуйста, напишите другое.

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**Two PM: Chicago, Illinois, USA:**

The bus pulled into the station and the kids quickly disembarked onto the streets of the enormous city. El led the way since she had been on this journey before. As they approached the old hideout Kali and her companions had been using they noticed that the damage from the police raid was still visible.

"Are you sure?" Mike asked her before she shrugged and grabbed his hand. Shaking his head, he allowed himself to be dragged into the structure without a second thought.

When they entered it was apparent that no one was living in this place nor had been for quite some time. Lucas and Max gave El an identical look of questioning annoyance.

"No one's here," Will said to break the disappointed silence.

"No. They're gone. I guess I was wrong," El said dejectedly.

"I thought you saw them in your mind?" Dustin queried. Everyone looked at EL expectantly except for Mike who looked at their still clasped hands solemnly.

"I thought I did. My powers haven't fully recovered from the monster

battle at the mall. I might have been seeing an impression left behind from before," El sadly declared.

"It's okay. We'll figure something else out," Max comforted.

"What? We don't have any place to go in Chicago!" Lucas exclaimed.

Will paused before speaking: "Well Jonathan and Nancy are here...somewhere."

"No offense but that doesn't even begin to solve our problems," Lucas snarkily responded.

They all stood in silence once again before Mike turned towards the door and began pacing. El looked at him with concern in her eyes. He was whispering to himself before turning abruptly towards his friends and smiling.

"I have an idea!" the former spy said excitedly.

"Yeah? Does it involve us dying or getting chased by Soviet assassins?" Lucas asked sarcastically.

"Chill Lucas," Max said while taking his hand in her own. He nodded before raising his eyebrows at Mike, prompting him to speak.

"I know of a place in Chicago where enemies of the Soviet state can find temporary shelter. We can probably make it there without using public transit. Then we can call my sister and Jonathan," Mike explained.

"Where is this place?" Max asked.

"I don't want to say out loud; just in case. I know it's a stretch right now but, trust me?" Mike asked hopefully.

Lucas looked ready to go on the attack again before Will interrupted: "Okay. I'll trust you. Let's do this."

"I agree," Dustin said.

EL nodded as well, but that was less surprising to anyone else in the

group. Now all eyes were on Max and Lucas. Max looked at her boyfriend before they both nodded in agreement. Finally they were all on the same page. Mike gestured for everyone to follow him, which they proceeded to do.

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The walk to Mike's secret safe haven took nearly an hour on foot, especially since the paranoid boy insisted on using side streets and shortcuts through parks. Eventually, Mike broke the silence of the journey by turning and saying: "Only one more block, guys. Let me do the talking when we get there please."

The Party rounded a corner and saw a church building. It was adorned and had signage in obviously slavic script. Mike approached the structure and pressed an electronic bell near the door. Moments later a short, bearded man in a cassock opened the door and looked at the group.

"Prostite, otets. Krasnyy rubin gryaznyy? Ya slyshal, chto moloko svezheye," Mike said. [Excuse me Father. Is the red ruby dirty? I heard the milk is fresh.]

"Vkhodi. U menya yest' pal'to," the man responded. [Come in. I have the coat.]

The man stood aside to allow the six teenagers to enter through the double doors into the faintly lit church. As soon as they were all inside he closed and locked the door giving Mike a hard stare. Mike looked back somewhat nervously before nodding comfortingly to his friends. The five truly American youths had no idea what was happening.

"Kto ty?" the cassock-wearing man asked Mike. [Who are you?]

The boy responded: "Ya znayu, ty znayesh', kto ya. Vy nekotoroye vremya izuchali proyekt moyego obrabotchika." [I know you know who I am. You have been looking into my handler's project for a while now.]

In response the older conversant merely nodded before speaking again: "Zachem ty prishel? Vy ishchete svobodu ili iskupleniye?"

[Why have you come? Do you seek freedom or redemption?]

"Oba, yesli eto vozmozhno," Mike replied. [Both if possible.]

The man now turned to address all six of them at once: "I think that is doable. Which of you is the miraculous child?".

They were stunned to be addressed in English by the clearly Russian priest. Mulling over what he asked, El eventually raised her hand nervously. The cleric nodded in recognition.

"I can provide shelter to you for a while if you so need. I am no friend to the barbarians in Moscow these days," he offered. Dustin breathed a sigh of relief.

The priest gestured for the six to follow him down a set of stairs into the level beneath the main church. There a hidden metal door they passed through led to a set of rooms resembling an apartment. There were three bedrooms and a small dual-purpose cooking and sitting space.

"This space is unknown to our common enemies and I can support your staying here for at least a few weeks," the priest explained.

"Thank you," El said softly. The group of friends looked at each other quizzically before nodding along with the girl.

"You look commanding," he said to Max before handing her a set of keys. She smirked at Lucas before nodding her thanks at the man.

"Get settled. We can talk later. Could you two follow me?" the priest said while pointing to Mike and El. The pair nodded and followed the man out of the secret rooms.

"So you are from Arkhangelsk Oblast, yes?" the priest asked Mike as they climbed the stairs.

"Yes," he responded.

"Did your parents ever let you near the Church there?" the older man asked.

"Not officially, but my birth-mother had me baptized and taught me about things a bit," Mike said softly.

"Do you wish to speak confessionally?" he asked.

"Yes Father. Please," Mike said at a whisper.

The man nodded and gestured for El to sit in a soft chair. She complied and the two males disappeared into an office. After nearly three-quarters of an hour they reemerged and Mike had tear-tracks on his face.

El jumped to her feet: "Are you okay?". Mike nodded before wrapping the girl in a tight hug.

"Father Nikolay just showed me the path to healing. I've never been better," Mike answered softly.

The three fell into a calm quiet before heading towards the staircase again. El stopped at the top and made eye contact with the priest.

"Why did you call me a 'miraculous child'? My powers are hardly a miracle. They're more like a curse," the girl queried.

"No, they are no curse. Sometimes miracles are made possible by the most horrible of things. You just have to take the opportunities presented for you to do good," Father Nikolay responded. El was stunned before a small tear escaped her eye as well.

Hugging her from the side, Mike led them back to the apartment where their friends were anxiously waiting. Father Nikolay bade them farewell before promising to return that evening. Mike and El opened the door and were instantly greeted with loud acclaim.

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The six kids had settled into their respective rooms: El with Max, Mike with Will, Lucas with Dustin. Father Nikolay had left some food in the room for them and the hungry teenagers had been very happy to sit around and eat until the man came back. Mike and El described vaguely what transpired while they were alone with the man. It was clear to the friends that they did not want to go into specifics.

"So Mike, I think it's time for more explanations," Lucas said after finishing a sandwich. The boy in question looked apprehensively at his companions before nodding.

"You guys deserve any answer I can offer," Mike verbally responded. El took his hand in hers again.

"How did you contact the Russians for all these years? You said that you reported things," Lucas asked.

Mike blushed: "I had a transmitter in my bedroom. My handler gave it to me when I was seven. He used it to conduct secure communications and give me orders."

"Your handler? What is a handler?" El asked.

"He managed my work for the KGB and gave me my instructions. All of my contact with them in the past years has been through him," Mike answered.

"Wait. If your handler gave you the transmitter then he has to be here, in America, right?" Dustin asked. Everyone looked at Mike worriedly.

"Um...I...ah," Mike said as he gripped his head in his hands and curled over to place his brow between his knees.

"Are you okay? Mike!" El shouted. The others expressed similar but less severe concern.

"I'm not allowed to talk about Agent...I mean my handler," Mike said softly.

"That's horrible. How could your own people do this to you?" Max asked the pained boy in front of her.

"I understand how," El said sincerely before Mike could answer. Everyone knew she truly did understand the cruelty of a secretive government better than most.

"Please ask some more questions. I hate myself for deceiving you all for so many years. Please. I'll answer anything I can," Mike

apologetically implored.

"How did you know about this place?" Lucas asked.

"I heard from you know who about some priests in Russian-American churches that help those on the run from the KGB," Mike answered. He then clarified somewhat: "This guy is one of them and I figured out which church he was at based on the proximity to the train station."

"Were you connected to that lab we found under Starcourt Mall?" Dustin asked.

"Sort of. I was supposed to gather information about the American project and locate El. I didn't know the lab was there but I knew what they wanted to do. It was my job to help them make their's successful where the American one failed. I suppose you can blame me for letting them know about the gate opened the first time but I didn't know what they would do with that information," Mike rambled.

"You told them about the gate?" Will pondered before continuing, "What about the Upside Down? Did you tell them about that too?".

"Yeah I did. I told them basically everything about what happened. Except for the more colorful details," Mike said while glancing at El with a small smile.

"Did they ever make you kill anyone?" El asked.

"No. I was just supposed to be a pair of unsuspected eyes and ears," Mike said.

"How did you break the conditioning to help us escape?" Dustin asked.

"I don't know if I 'broke' the conditioning, but I did overcome it. Who knows if I could repeat it again but I felt my entire world collapsing in on itself when I imagined El taken away to the place they trained me or worse. Suddenly that pain overrode the physical pain in my head," Mike answered, his voice become faint near the end.

El suddenly grabbed his shoulders and twisted his body around to

face her before wrapping her arms around his neck. The boy returned the gesture and breathed in her scent as if it had been years since their last embrace. Their friends knew to let them be for a while.

After the less serious camaraderie of the shared meal had reasserted itself, the door to the apartment opened and Father Nikolay entered carrying a phone. He walked over to the counter and plugged the device into the wall before turning to assess the six kids sitting together. He smiled and pointed towards the phone.

"This phone will make untraceable calls if you keep them under three minutes. I don't know if you have anyone you need to contact but I thought you should have the option," the priest said.

"My brother and his girlfriend are here in the city. Could we call them and ask them to come here?" Will asked.

"I suppose that would be safe enough if we handle things right. You call your brother and tell him to meet me at the end of the street. Do you have a favorite song?" Father Nikolay instructed and queried.

"Yes," Will answered.

"Good. Tell him to give the name of the song as the code to confirm his identity to me. Don't say the name of the song on the phone," the priest suggested. Will nodded in agreement.

"I don't know the..." Will started.

"I've got the number here," Mike interrupted while handing his friend a phonebook with his finger pointing out the hotel's line.

Dialing the number Will spoke to the hotel employee: "Hello. Could you please put me through to the room of Jonathan Byers and Nancy Wheeler?".

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Jonathan and Nancy had been enjoying their time in Chicago before their parents had called to tell them that their younger siblings had disappeared into the night. They planned to return to Hawkins first thing in the morning to help search for the beloved children and were frantically packing their things when a phone call rang out in their

hotel room. They looked at each other before Nancy walked over and picked up the receiver.

"This is Nancy Wheeler, who's there?" she asked briskly.

"Hey Nancy, it's Will," came the voice from the other end.

"Will!" Nancy exclaimed.

"Will is on the phone?" Jonathan asked before dashing over and gently prying the device from his girlfriend. The older brother addressed the younger dearly: "I'm so glad to hear from you. Where are you guys. Mom is so worried."

"Jonathan you have to listen to me now. Things are very dangerous. I need you to meet a friend of mine in thirty minutes. Can you do that? You'll have to tell him the name of our special song to confirm that it's you," Will said urgently.

"Yeah I can do that, but what's going..." Jonathan tried to inquire.

"I can't explain now. Just come to the address I'm about to give you. Don't call anyone else; just you and Nancy. Okay?" Will instructed.

"Okay," Jonathan answered as he prepared to memorize the address.

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Jonathan and Nancy approached the meeting point and saw an older-looking clergyman just as Will had described.

"Are you the man?" Jonathan asked him as he walked up.

"What is the song?" the man questioned.

"Should I Stay or Should I Go," Jonathan answered.

"By?" he pressed.

"The Clash of course," Jonathan said with a laugh.

Father Nikolay nodded and gestured for them to follow him into the church. He led the two young adults through the same pathway to

the secret apartment before knocking on the door. It swung open and Max's head poked through.

"Hey guys!" the girl said.

"Hey Max," Nancy said uncertainly.

"Let's go inside before everyone catches up, yes?" Father Nikolay suggested. The three nodded and they all entered before shutting and locking the metal doors.

"Mike! What's going on?" Nancy exclaimed while running to hug her little brother. The boy returned the hug nervously before shrinking back away from her and rubbing the back of his neck.

"Well it's a bit complicated," he mumbled.

"You two might want to sit down," Dustin joked before the past day's revelations and events were conveyed to Jonathan and Nancy.

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**Review Incentive: You tell me what you want to see next time...**

**1) Lots of dialogue and some Mileven moments**

**OR**

**2) Brief catch-up with lots of plot-forwarding action.**